



Suriname

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2002](#)

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The Government is still in the process of institutionalizing democratic, constitutional rule in the country. After generally free and fair elections in May 2000, the 51-member National Assembly elected Ronald Venetiaan of the National Party of Suriname (NPS) as President in August 2000; he replaced Jules Wijdenbosch of the National Democratic Party (NDP). Venetiaan previously served as President in 1991-96. The judiciary was generally independent, although it was inefficient.

The armed forces were responsible for national security and border and immigration control; they were under the effective control of the civilian Minister of Defense. Civilian police bore primary responsibility for the maintenance of law and order; they reported to the Ministry of Justice and Police. During the year, the military helped the police maintain security in remote communities near large enterprises and conducted joint patrols with the police on an ad hoc basis to combat crime on highways. The first Venetiaan Government had reformed the military in 1995-96 by purging military officers and supporters of former dictator Desi Bouterse, who ruled the country in the 1980s. Bouterse's NDP won 10 seats in the National Assembly in 2000, 1 of which he occupies. Over the past few years, the NDP's influence within the military declined steadily; however, Bouterse still retained influence with some military officers. The military police continued to maintain responsibility for control of the country's borders and airports, but it had not investigated civilian crimes since 1989. Members of the police and prison guards committed some human rights abuses.

The mixed economy depended heavily on the export of bauxite derivatives. The country's population was approximately 450,000. The Government and state-owned companies employed over half the working population. Unregulated gold mining was an increasingly important economic activity that highlighted a lack of land rights for indigenous and tribal peoples and had a serious negative environmental impact. Estimated gross domestic product grew by approximately 3 percent. The inflation rate was 28.3 percent, compared with 4.2 percent in 2001 and 82 percent in 2000. Poverty was widespread; one report estimated that 85 percent of families lived below the poverty line.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, serious problems remained in some areas. Police mistreated detainees, particularly during arrests; guards abused prisoners; and local detention facilities remained overcrowded. Lengthy pretrial detention was a problem, and the judiciary suffered from ineffectiveness and a huge case backlog due to the shortage of judges. Media self-censorship continued. Societal discrimination against women, minorities, and tribal people persisted. Violence against women and trafficking in women and girls were problems. Suriname was invited by the Community of Democracies' (CD) Convening Group to attend the November 2002 second CD Ministerial Meeting in Seoul, Republic of Korea, as a participant.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents.

In August 2001, there was one report of an alleged police killing in the town of Albina, on the border with French Guiana. When the police took a man into custody on suspicion of motor bike theft, they took him to a detention

area and handcuffed him. He allegedly tried to escape and was shot in the back of the head without warning. The victim's family called for an investigation into the shooting. According to Moiwana '86, a human rights group, the responsible police officer was tried in March, found guilty, and sentenced to 5 years in prison.

The Government did not address many past abuses, and they continued to be a focus of concern. The authorities took no action against prison guards who allegedly beat a prisoner to death in 1993. There was no investigation into the 1986 massacre of more than 50 civilians at the village of Moiwana; however, according to various human rights groups, the Venetiaan Government appeared to be interested in investigating the Moiwana case but did not actually begin an investigation. In 1997 Moiwana '86 took the case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), which gave the Government until December 1 to report on the status of its investigation.

After the elections in 2000, there were calls for the new Government to launch an investigation into the December 1982 killings by the Bouterse regime of 15 prominent political, labor, business, and media leaders before the 18-year statute of limitations expired in December 2000. In October 2000, the Court of Justice began hearings on the killings in response to a request from relatives of the victims. Bouterse's lawyer sought to postpone the hearings, but the court denied his request. The court heard testimony from the victims' relatives, human rights activists, and the prosecutor's office, which had not yet made any investigation into the killings. Previously, Bouterse himself had requested an investigation, after the victims' relatives asked a Dutch court to prosecute him in that country. In September 2001, the Dutch court ruled that it did not have jurisdiction, but the Dutch High Court later ruled that some of the charges against Bouterse could be prosecuted in the Netherlands. Following an order from the Court of Justice, an examining judge continued an investigation into the killings. During the year, two rogatory commissions visited the Netherlands to gather testimony, and with the collection of testimony completed, Dutch forensic experts arrived to examine exhumed bodies. However, no suspects were charged or brought to trial by year's end.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

However, the Government had yet to take any action to investigate allegations of some disappearances that occurred under previous regimes.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits inhuman treatment or punishment; however, human rights groups continued to express concern about official mistreatment and have documented cases of police mistreatment of detainees, particularly during arrests, and guard abuse of prisoners.

Citizens filed a total of 235 cases with the Personnel Investigation Department (OPZ), the majority of which were for physical mistreatment. The OPZ is an office within the Police Department that is responsible for investigating complaints against officers. It makes recommendations regarding whether or not an officer should be punished internally, or if criminal charges should be brought. The authorities arrested 10 officers and relieved 22 officers from their duties. Police officers have been charged with brutality, but no figures were available regarding sentencing.

Beatings by police were common. Police officers, who were not trained in prison work, served as the jailers at local detention facilities, a situation that human rights groups asserted contributed to the abuses. There were three prisons and several detention facilities at police stations, where arrestees were detained until they appeared before a judge for trial. Human rights activists were concerned about conditions in the prisons and especially about conditions in local detention facilities, which remained overcrowded. At police stations, guards allowed detainees no exercise and only rarely permitted them to leave their cells. Detainees and human rights groups also complained about inadequate meals, although families were permitted and encouraged to provide food to incarcerated relatives. There was no consideration for persons who required a specific diet for religious reasons. Human rights monitors reported that guards mistreated detainees, and that medical care and living conditions were inadequate.

Prison conditions were poor, and in many cases they did not meet international standards. Violence among prisoners was common, and the authorities usually did not punish prisoners for violence against other prisoners. Some prison facilities were renovated in recent years, which improved health and safety conditions. However, most facilities, especially older jails, remained unsanitary and seriously overcrowded, with as many as four times the number of detainees for which they were designed.

Conditions in women's jail and prison facilities were, in general, better than those in the men's facilities. There was a wing of an adult prison for boys under age 18 who had committed serious crimes. Juvenile facilities for boys between the ages of 10 and 18 within the adult prison were adequate; educational and recreational facilities were provided. There was no separate facility for girls under the age of 18, who were housed within the women's detention center and in the women's section of one of the prison complexes.

Since 1996 Moiwana '86 has monitored the condition of prisoners. Representatives of the group reported that in general they had access to prisoners and received cooperation from prison officials on routine matters. When requesting access to individual prisoners, human rights observers generally gained access quickly. However, if an individual had filed a complaint with the organization claiming physical mistreatment, access often was delayed. The authorities granted the group permission to visit one prison on a regular basis, on the condition that they meet with the head of the prison following such visits. Moiwana '86 reported that the authorities granted all requests for prison visits during the year.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the authorities generally respected these provisions in practice. However, delays caused prisoners who appealed their sentences to remain in prison until a ruling was reached on their appeal, even if they had served the full term of their original sentence. Lawyers filed complaints, but the problem was not resolved.

The law provides that the police may detain for investigation for up to 14 days a person suspected of committing a crime for which the sentence is longer than 4 years. During the 14-day period, the law also permits incommunicado detention, which must be authorized by an assistant district attorney or a police inspector. Within the 14-day period, the police must bring the accused before a prosecutor to be charged formally. If additional time is needed to investigate the charge, a prosecutor may authorize the police to detain the suspect for an additional 30 days. Upon the expiration of the initial 44 days, a judge of instruction may authorize the police to hold the suspect for up to 120 additional days, in 30-day increments (for a total of 164 days), before the case is tried. The judge of instruction has the power to authorize release on bail, but that power was used rarely, if ever. In July 2001, there was a fire in the lower courthouse, which caused a delay both in investigations and in court proceedings. As a result, in August 2001 the Government enacted emergency legislation that lengthened the initial period an inmate may be held without judicial appearance to 120 days. A judge may extend the period twice by 30 days.

Pretrial detainees, who constituted a large percentage of inmates, routinely were held without being brought before a judge. The average length of pretrial detention varied; for lesser crimes it was from 30 to 45 days, while for more serious crimes, the maximum time usually was utilized. Detainees often were held in overcrowded detention cells at local police stations. A steadily growing number of persons who already had been convicted but not yet placed in prisons due to a lack of space in prison facilities were held in police custody or detention cells.

The military police continued to observe the requirement to hand over to the civil police civilians arrested for committing a crime in their presence.

The Constitution does not address exile; however, it was not used in practice.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, disputes over the appointment of judges to the bench undermined the independence of the judiciary in recent years. In 2000 the President appointed a new Solicitor General, and the Court of Justice confirmed him in September 2001. The President had yet to confirm the Acting Attorney General, although he has served in that position since 2000. Appointment as Attorney General is a lifetime position. As a result of the conflict from previous years, the effectiveness of the civilian and military courts still was limited in practice, but at year's end the judiciary appeared to be acting generally independently, albeit inefficiently, since it was hampered by a large case backlog.

The judicial system consisted of three lower courts and an appeals court, which was called the Court of Justice; there was no Supreme Court. The Government had not yet appointed a permanent president for the Court of Justice. There were only seven judges and five acting judges in the judiciary. The 1987 Constitution calls for the establishment of an independent constitutional court; the National Assembly debated creating such a court since then, but had not done so.

The Constitution provides for the right to a fair public trial in which defendants have the right to counsel if needed.

The courts assign lawyers in private practice to defend indigent prisoners and pay lawyers from public funds. However, the court-assigned lawyers, of whom there were four, usually only appeared at the trial. According to Moiwana '86, sometimes these lawyers did not appear at all. The courts must, and in practice did, free a detainee who was not tried within the 164-day period. Trials were before a single judge, with the right of appeal. Due to the shortage of judges, there was a backlog of cases of 1 year for civil cases and up to 6 months for criminal cases.

Military personnel generally were not subject to civilian criminal law. A member of the armed forces accused of a crime immediately came under military jurisdiction, and military police were responsible for all such investigations. Military prosecutions were directed by an officer on the public prosecutor's staff and took place in separate courts before two military judges and one civilian judge. The military courts followed the same rules of procedure as the civil courts. There was no appeal from the military to the civil system.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution provides for the right to privacy. The law requires warrants, which are issued by quasi-judicial officers who supervise criminal investigations, for searches. The police obtained them in the great majority of investigations. While in the past there were complaints of surveillance of human rights workers by members of the military police and the Central Intelligence and Security Service, none were reported during the year. There was still a threat of forced resettlement of indigenous populations due to the granting of timber and gold concessions (see Section 5).

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government generally respected these rights; however, some media members continued to practice occasional self-censorship because of the history of intimidation and reprisals by certain elements of the former military leadership.

In July the daily newspaper De West was threatened in connection with its coverage of weapons theft from the Government's Central Intelligence and Security Service. In April 2000, that newspaper had been firebombed, but no suspects were arrested. According to De West, police knew the perpetrator of the crime.

There were 3 daily newspapers, 11 television stations, and about 25 radio stations. Three television stations and two radio stations were owned publicly. Three companies, one owned publicly, provided cable television, which included foreign channels. Many television and radio stations broadcast only in a limited area. Two companies, one private and one public, offered unrestricted access to electronic media.

The Government did not restrict access to the Internet.

The Government did not restrict academic freedom.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. Despite a law from the 1930s requiring a permit to hold a public demonstration or gathering, the authorities allowed public marches to proceed without permits, if they were orderly and guided by police.

The Constitution provides for freedom of association, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

For more detailed information see the 2002 International Religious Freedom Report.

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

Citizens may change their residence and workplaces freely and may travel abroad as they wish. Political dissidents who emigrated during the years of military rule were welcome to return. Few of them chose to do so, generally for economic reasons. Citizenship was not revoked for political reasons.

Although it is possible for persons to be granted refugee status under special circumstances, there are no provisions in the law for granting asylum or refugee status in accordance with the standards of the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. There were no such requests during the year.

The Government cooperated with the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. The issue of the provision of first asylum did not arise.

There were no reports of the forced return of persons to a country where they feared persecution.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides for this right, but in the past the military prevented its effective exercise. Although the military twice transferred power to elected civilian governments following coups, 2000 marked the second time since independence from the Netherlands in 1975 that one elected government succeeded another in accordance with constitutional provisions. The Government is still in the process of institutionalizing democratic, constitutional rule.

The Constitution stipulates that power and authority rest with the citizens and provides for the right to change the government through the direct election by secret ballot of a National Assembly of 51 members every 5 years. The National Assembly then elects the President by a two-thirds majority vote. If the legislature is unable to do so, as was the case both in the 1991 and 1996 national elections, the Constitution provides that a national people's assembly, composed of Members of Parliament and regional and local officials, shall elect the President.

The law allows early elections with the concurrence of both the National Assembly and the President; in May 1999, widespread street demonstrations triggered by the declining economy forced the Government of then-President Wijdenbosch to call early elections, which were held in May 2000. After those elections, which observers considered to be generally free and fair, the National Assembly elected NPS leader Ronald Venetiaan as President in August 2000.

The Constitution provides for the organization and functioning of political parties. Many parties and political coalitions were represented in the National Assembly. President Venetiaan formed a cabinet from members of the New Front coalition, comprised of the NPS, a predominantly Creole party; the Progressive Reform Party, a predominantly Hindustani party; the Suriname Labor Party, a political wing of the largest labor union; and Pertjaja Luhur, a predominantly Javanese party.

There were historical and cultural impediments to equal participation by women in leadership positions in government and political parties. In the past, most women were expected to fulfill the roles of housewife and mother, thereby limiting opportunities to gain political experience or position. Participation by women in politics (and other fields) generally was considered inappropriate. While women made limited gains in attaining political power in recent years, political circles remained under the influence of traditional male-dominated groups, and women were disadvantaged in seeking high public office. There were 10 women in the 51-seat National Assembly; in 2000 the Assembly appointed a woman as vice chairperson. The Cabinet included one woman as Minister of Foreign Affairs, another as Minister of Internal Affairs, and a third as Deputy Minister of Social Affairs. In February 2001, the first female member of the Court of Justice was sworn in.

Although the Constitution prohibits racial and religious discrimination, several factors limited the participation of Maroons (descendants of escaped slaves who fled to the interior to avoid recapture) and Amerindians in the political process. Most of the country's political activity took place in the capital and a narrow belt running east and west of it along the coast. The Maroons and Amerindians were concentrated in remote areas in the interior and therefore had limited access to, and influence on, the political process. Voters elected the first Amerindians to the National Assembly in 1996. In the May 2000 elections, voters elected eight Maroons and one Amerindian to the National Assembly. There were no Maroons or Amerindians in the Cabinet.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations

of Human Rights

Human rights groups operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases; however, government officials generally were not cooperative or responsive to their views.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution and laws, with the exception of certain ethnic marriage laws, do not differentiate among citizens on the basis of their ethnic origins, religious affiliations, or other cultural differences. However, in practice several groups within society suffered various forms of discrimination.

Women

Violence against women was a problem. The law does not differentiate between domestic violence and other forms of assault. The Government has not addressed specifically the problem of violence against women. According to a national women's group, victims continued to report cases of violence against women and complained of an inadequate response from the Government and society to what appeared to be a trend of increasing family violence. No reliable statistics were available as to the extent of the problem. However, Stop the Violence Against Women, a nongovernmental organization (NGO), stated that among those women who reported their abuse to the group, the average abused woman was married, between the ages of 25 and 50, had two to three children, and was employed in a low-paying job. Although the police were reluctant to intervene in instances of domestic violence, a national women's group noted that police attitudes improved significantly as a result of training conducted in 1999. For example, two police stations opened victim's rooms, the first in Nickerie in 2000 and the second during the year in Paramaribo, to provide better services to victims of all kinds of crimes. The Government planned to open a victim's room in every police station.

Rape is illegal, but spousal rape was not against the law. During the year, there were 50 prosecutions for rape, with 38 convictions; sentences ranged from 12 months to 5 years.

There were no specific laws to protect women against sexual exploitation. Prostitution is illegal; however, law enforcement officials did not enforce prostitution laws or arrest women for prostitution unless they were working on the street. Police allowed many "brothel-type" establishments to operate, and officials asserted that they made random checks on the brothels twice a month to see if women were being abused or held against their will. In spite of this effort, there were credible reports of trafficking in women for prostitution (see Section 6.f.).

There were no laws prohibiting sexual harassment, and it did occur.

Women had the right to equal access to education, employment, and property. Nevertheless, social pressures and customs, especially in rural areas, inhibited their full exercise of these rights, particularly in the areas of marriage and inheritance. Women experienced economic discrimination in access to employment and in rates of pay for the same or substantially similar work. A report published in March showed that 89 percent of women were employed in entry-level positions, 9 percent had mid-level jobs, and 3 percent held management positions. More than 60 percent of women worked in traditionally female administrative or secretarial jobs. The Government did not make specific efforts to combat economic discrimination. In February the Government ratified the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against women; as a result, it has to adjust existing legislation to bring it into compliance with the Convention.

There was a National Gender Bureau in the Ministry of Home Affairs, which prepared an Integral Gender Action plan for 2000-2005 and appointed a program manager for gender policy in June 2001. However, its effectiveness was limited severely by financial and staffing constraints. The principal concerns of women's groups were political representation, economic vulnerability, violence, and discrimination.

Children

The Government allocated only limited resources to ensure safeguards for the human rights and welfare of children. School is compulsory until 12 years of age, but some school-age children did not have access to education due to a lack of transportation, facilities, or teachers. School attendance was free; however, most public schools imposed a nominal enrollment fee, ranging from \$4 to \$24 (Sf10,000 to Sf60,000) a year. If a family was unable to pay, the Government provided assistance. Families must supply uniforms, books, and miscellaneous supplies. Approximately 70 percent of children in cities attended school. Children in the interior did not receive the same level of education as those in the city, and as few as 40 percent actually attended school. Children faced

increasing economic pressure to discontinue their education in order to work (see Section 6.d.). There was no legal difference in the treatment of girls and boys in education or health care services, and in practice both were treated fairly equally.

There were continuing reports of malnutrition among poor children, but it was difficult to quantify the extent of the problem. In the capital, where most of the country's population was concentrated, there were several orphanages and one privately funded shelter for sexually abused children. Elsewhere, distressed children usually relied on the resources of their extended families.

There was no societal pattern of abuse directed against children; however, some children were exploited sexually, and there were credible reports of trafficking in girls for prostitution (see Section 6.f.). There was increased awareness of sexual abuse of children during the year, although the number of reports declined. During the year, a local NGO mounted a campaign against child sexual abuse in a newspaper and on the radio to increase awareness.

The legal age of sexual consent is 14; however, it was not enforced strictly, and the Asian Marriage Law sets the marriage age for children of Asian descent at 13 years for girls and 15 years for boys. Otherwise, individuals of Asian descent must be 30 years old to marry without parental permission.

Persons with Disabilities

There were no laws concerning persons with disabilities and no provisions for making private or public buildings accessible to them. There were also no laws mandating that they be given equal consideration when seeking jobs or housing. However, there were some training programs for the blind and others with disabilities. In practice persons with disabilities suffered from discrimination when applying for jobs and services.

Indigenous People

The Constitution affords no special protection for, or recognition of, indigenous people. Most Amerindians suffered a number of disadvantages and had only limited ability to participate in decisions affecting their lands, cultures, traditions, and natural resources. The country's political life, educational opportunities, and jobs were concentrated in the capital and its environs, while the majority of Amerindians (as well as Maroons) lived in the interior. Government services in the interior were largely unavailable, and much of the infrastructure was destroyed during the 1986-91 insurgencies; progress in reestablishing services and rebuilding the infrastructure was very slow.

The Government-appointed Consultative Council for the Development of the Interior, provided for in the 1992 peace accords that formally ended the insurgencies, included representatives of the Maroon and Amerindian communities. However, the Government did not consult with representatives of these communities about the granting of gold and timber concessions on indigenous and tribal lands. Following demonstrations in July 2001 by veterans of the Jungle Commando, who played a large role in the insurgencies, their de facto leader Ronny Brunswijk met with the Minister of Regional Development. The meeting resulted in a promise of quarterly meetings to monitor implementation of the 2001 Lelydorp Accord, which superseded the 1992 peace accords. The Government began integrating former Jungle Commando members into the police but had not implemented the native land rights portion of the agreement.

Organizations representing Maroon and Amerindian communities complained that small-scale mining operations, mainly by illegal Brazilian gold miners, dug trenches that cut residents off from their agricultural land and threatened to drive them away from their traditional settlements. Mercury runoff from these operations also contaminated and threatened traditional food source areas.

The Maroon and Amerindian populations still faced problems with illegal and uncontrolled logging and mining. In October 2000, the Vereniging van Saramakaanse Gezagdragers, an organization representing 12 Saramaccaner villages, filed a petition with the IACHR claiming that lumber operations, mostly by Chinese-owned concessions, were threatening their way of life. The villagers sought observance of a 1762 treaty between their ancestors and Dutch colonial authorities, which granted ownership of the interior to the tribes as long as they occupied the land. At year's end, the case was still pending, and the Government had not investigated the alleged claims.

A major bauxite producer had continued problems with Maroon groups; the Maroons claimed that the concessions were located on tribal land, and the company claimed infringement on its concessions. The company depended upon the police and army to monitor the area and prevent conflict.

Maroon and Amerindian groups continued to cooperate with each other in order to exercise their rights more effectively. During an annual meeting in September, the Association of Indigenous Village Chiefs discussed socioeconomic problems, land rights, nature reserves, and biodiversity. The leaders wanted the Government to honor provisions of the peace accords with the Jungle Commando in 1991 and with the Tucajana Amazonas in 1992 to establish economic zones around both Maroon and indigenous communities.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The Constitution protects the right of workers to associate and to choose their representatives democratically. Nearly 60 percent of the work force was organized into unions, and most unions belonged to one of the country's six major labor federations. Unions were independent of the Government but played an active role in politics. The small Labor Party historically was a very influential force in government.

The law prohibits antiunion discrimination by employers, and there are effective mechanisms for resolving complaints of such discrimination. Employers must have prior permission from the Ministry of Labor to fire workers, except when discharging an employee for cause. The Labor Ministry individually reviews dismissals for cause; if it finds a discharge unjustified, the employee must be reinstated.

There were no restrictions on unions' international activities. Unions were active members of both the International Labor Organization and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The Constitution explicitly recognizes these rights, and the authorities respected them in practice. Collective bargaining agreements covered approximately 50 percent of the labor force. Bauxite industry workers were organized, but gold miners were not.

The Constitution provides for the right to strike. Civil servants have the right to strike, and strikes in both the public and private sectors were common as workers tried to regain wages lost to inflation in previous years.

There were a number of strikes during the year. Striking fire fighters refused to assist a driver who was trapped following a collision; as a result, the driver died. The police union went on strike, but called it off after 3 days when the Government began a court case against the union. Other strikes involved government day care workers, banana workers, and a union representing workers manufacturing consumer goods.

There were no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Bonded Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced or bonded labor. The law prohibits forced and bonded labor by children; however, child prostitution did occur (see Section 6.f.).

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The law sets the minimum age for employment at 14 years; however, the Ministry of Labor and the police enforced this law only sporadically. Children under 14 years of age worked as street vendors, newspaper sellers, or shop assistants. Working hours for youths were not limited in comparison with the regular work force. Although government figures reported that only 2 percent of children were economically active, another survey found that 50 percent of children between the ages of 4 and 14 years were economically active, working mainly in the informal sector. The Government has not ratified the International Labor Organization's Convention 182 on elimination of the worst forms of child labor.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There was no minimum wage legislation. Including a cost of living allowance, the lowest wage for civil servants was about \$138 (Sf386,000) per month. This salary level made it very difficult to provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. Government employees, who constituted approximately 50 percent of the work force of 100,000 persons, frequently supplemented their salaries with second or third jobs, often in the informal sector. The

President and Council of Ministers set and approve civil service wage increases.

Work in excess of 9 hours per day or 45 hours per week on a regular basis required special government permission, which was granted routinely. Such overtime work earned premium pay. The law requires one 24-hour rest period per week.

A 10- to 12-member inspectorate in the Occupational Health and Safety Division of the Ministry of Labor was responsible for enforcing legislated occupational safety and health regulations. Resource constraints and lack of trained personnel precluded the division from making regular inspections of industry. There was no law authorizing workers to refuse to work in circumstances they deem unsafe; they must appeal to the inspectorate to declare the workplace situation unsafe.

f. Trafficking in Persons

The only laws that prohibit trafficking in persons were dated "white slavery" laws that were enforced rarely and applied only to women and children. There were credible reports of trafficking in women and girls within the country and to the country for prostitution. The country also was a transit point for trafficking. Women and girls from the interior were brought to the capital city and also to various gold mining locations in the interior. Several clubs in the capital were known for recruiting women from Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, and the Caribbean (Guyana, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic). While prostitution is illegal, the law was not enforced. The police had an informal agreement with many "hotel" or brothel owners to allow them to proceed with their business as long as they did not hold the women's passports and the women were not mistreated. Random checks were performed on the establishments weekly; in several instances, police officers worked as advisers to the owners.

Brothel owners often attempted to hold airline tickets for women they had paid to bring to the country to ensure that the women completed their contracts. The police arranged a compromise with the brothels and the prostitutes that when disagreements arose, the police would hold the ticket until an agreement was reached. There were some reported instances of individuals brought to the country under false pretenses and then forced to work as prostitutes. In cases where the victims were able to alert the police, the police helped them to return to their country of origin at the victims' expense. In 2001 one club owner in Paramaribo was convicted in Brazil for trafficking in women.

There were credible reports of individuals using the country as a transit point to transport Brazilian women to Europe and the United States for purposes of prostitution. In addition, alien smuggling organizations used the country as an intermediate destination to smuggle Chinese and Indian nationals, including women and girls, to the United States, where frequently they were forced into bonded-labor situations.